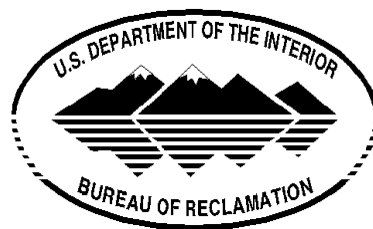


**U.S. Department of the Interior  
Bureau of Reclamation**

**Employee Customer Service Survey**  
*a synopsis of process, results, and directions for a path forward*



## **U.S. Bureau of Reclamation**

### **Employee Customer Service Survey**

*a synopsis of process, results, and directions for a path forward*

The Bureau of Reclamation recently completed a customer service survey of its employees. The survey was done as a follow-up action to an external Customer Satisfaction Survey completed in 1998. The survey process and results are discussed in-depth in the following pages.

#### ***Why We Surveyed Our Employees***

The idea to survey Reclamation employees came from a Customer Satisfaction Survey recommendation. The purpose of surveying employees was to gather information about Reclamation's customer service program and performance. Specifically, the survey was designed to determine the employees' basic understanding of customer service principles and agency policies regarding customer service, determine the level of interaction between employees and customers, gather data to compare employees' perceptions of customer service with customers' perceptions, solicit ideas for customer service improvements from the staff members who most frequently deal with customers, and to learn what employees believe are Reclamation's greatest strengths and challenges in customer service.

#### ***Survey Design and Methodology***

The employee survey was designed to mirror the Customer Satisfaction survey previously completed by Reclamation's customers and partners. The Customer Satisfaction Survey respondents had been asked to rate or comment on Reclamation's performance in four general areas.

- ! Doing Business with the Bureau of Reclamation - how well does Reclamation meet your needs.
- ! Assessing the Bureau of Reclamation Staff - what has been your experience in dealing with the staff.
- ! Evaluating the Bureau of Reclamation's Performance - looking at 14 program areas.
- ! Your ideas - an opportunity for you to make suggestions on how Reclamation could improve its performance.

In 1999, Argonne National Laboratory, along with Reclamation staff, designed the survey instrument. Argonne and the Customer Service Initiatives Team (CSIT) met in 1999, to discuss the goals and objectives of the survey. From that meeting, it was decided that the survey would provide Reclamation with information on how to improve customer service practices. The objectives of the survey were to:

- ! Determine employees' basic understanding of customer service principles and agency policies regarding customer service,
- ! Determine the level of interaction between employees and customers,
- ! Gather data to compare employees' perceptions of customer service with

- customers' perceptions,
- ! Solicit ideas for customer service improvements from the staff members who most frequently deal with customers,
- ! Learn what employees believe are Reclamation's greatest strengths and challenges in customer service, and
- ! Establish a baseline of customer satisfaction for use in future benchmarking of customer service.

The Employee Customer Service Survey consisted of 16 questions which measured 44 attributes through 12-close-ended and 4-open-ended questions divided into five broad categories.

- < **Employees' Performance in Customer Service**
- < **Your Role in Customer Service**
- < **Reclamation's Performance (*as an agency*) in Customer Service**
- < **Reclamation's Performance in Programs and Initiatives**
- < **Information About You**

To gauge how Reclamation employees view customer service, the majority of questions asked of customers in 1998 were restructured into employee first person type questions in the employee survey.

Finally, since not all Reclamation employees interact with external customers on a regular basis, the survey's first section served as an "off ramp" for employees who only deal with customers on an annual or less basis. These employees were asked to skip to the end of the survey and provide demographic information. This design accommodated the survey's main purpose, to gather information from employees who interact with customers on a regular basis.

### ***Who Was Surveyed***

The Employee Customer Service Survey wasn't a sample. All Reclamation employees were given the opportunity to participate in the survey, and of the 6,200 mailed out 2,789 (45%) employees responded. The similar 1998 Customer Satisfaction Survey was sent to 3,011 customers and partners and 835 (30%) responded.

### ***Survey Results***

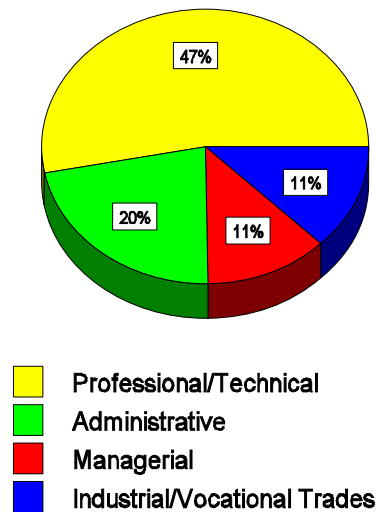
More than three-quarters of the 2,789 employee responses came from Reclamation's five Regions and their Area Office employees. The percentage of respondents was fairly even throughout the regions, with the Pacific Northwest having the highest rate at 24% and the Mid- Pacific and the Great Plains Region tied for the lowest rate of 16%. The Reclamation CSIT believes that these percentages are representative of the actual regional employees' populations. The Reclamation Service Center provided 20% of the respondents and the Commissioner's Office had the lowest number of response's accountings for 3%. These numbers mirror Reclamation's employee population almost exactly.

Respondents had four position types to select from, professional/technical, managerial, administrative, and industrial/vocational. Of the four position types, the greatest number of respondents (47%) came from the professional/technical group. In 1998, the Customer Satisfaction Survey respondents also noted that they interact the most (45%) with

professional/technical positions. Administrative personnel accounted for the next highest number of respondents (20%); industrial/vocational and managerial each accounted for 11% of the respondents. These numbers are also representative of the overall employee population.

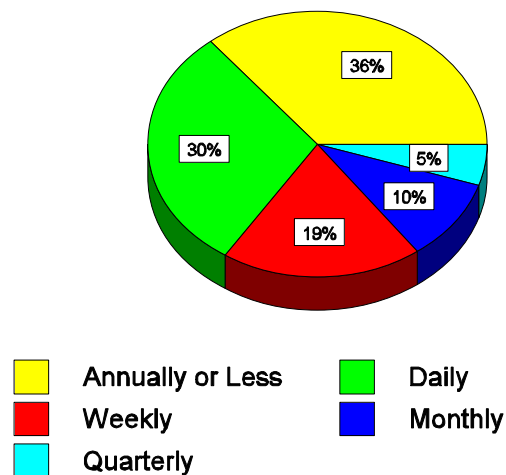
Along with identifying the type of occupational position, employees were also asked how often they deal with customers — daily, weekly, monthly, quarterly, or annually or less. Close to two-thirds (64%) of the respondents reported customer interaction at least quarterly and nearly half (49%) reported either daily or weekly customer interaction. When non-responses are factored in, the number of employees interacting with customers on at least a quarterly basis approach two thirds of all employees or as many as 4,064.

**Positions of Respondents**

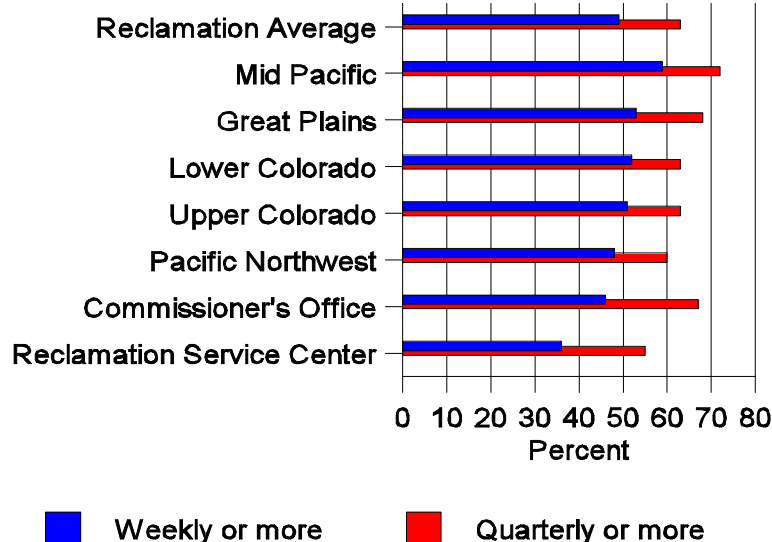


**Frequency of Employee**

Interaction with Customers



**Customer Interaction**



### ***Evaluation of Reclamation's Staff***

Respondents were asked to evaluate Reclamation staff's interaction with customers in five areas: accessibility, helpfulness, knowledge levels, timeliness of responses, and courteousness/respectfulness. A six-point scale, which consisted of always, often, sometimes, rarely, never and don't know, was used for the five areas mentioned above. Overall, employees gave themselves high marks in all categories with more than 60% of the responses recorded as always or often. For the most part, employee ratings were consistent with the customers' ratings. On both surveys, participants rated the staff highest in being courteous/respectful and lowest in being timely in their responses. Except in the category of accessibility, Reclamation employees rated themselves slightly lower than the customers did. In the case of accessibility, employees rated themselves as accessible 78% of the time, while the customers rated the staff at 74%. The lack of accessibility was one of the significant findings of the 1998 Customer Satisfaction Survey. The biggest difference in ratings between groups was with respect to the attribute measuring job knowledge, where 78% of the customers found Reclamation staff to be always or often knowledgeable. On the other hand, only 69% of employees rated the staff as always or often knowledgeable. There were organizational differences in the rating of the five areas. The Upper Colorado, Mid-Pacific, and Reclamation Service Center had higher ratings in most attributes, whereas the Great Plains, Pacific Northwest, and Lower Colorado Regions rated staff lower in most categories. The Commissioner's Office rated the staff much lower than any other group.

<b>Organizational Comparison of Percentages of Respondents Answering Always or Often to Five Attributes</b>					
<b>Region/ Office</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<b>Helpful</b>	<b>Knowledgeable</b>	<b>Timely in their Response</b>	<b>Courteous/ Respectful</b>
Mid-Pacific	85%	68%	69%	66%	89%
Upper Colorado	79%	66%	73%	64%	93%
Pacific Northwest	77%	66%	72%	59%	89%
Lower Colorado	76%	65%	64%	59%	86%
Great Plains	73%	67%	66%	54%	88%
Reclamation Service Center	81%	68%	69%	63%	92%
Commissioner's Office	71%	54%	57%	43%	77%
<b>Overall Average*</b>	<b>78%</b>	<b>67%</b>	<b>69%</b>	<b>61%</b>	<b>89%</b>

*\*Average of total responses without weighting to compensate for uneven responses from various organizational units.*

### ***Greatest Strength in Customer Service***

Employees were asked what they thought Reclamations' greatest strength in customer service was, and 940 responses (52% response rate) were received. Only employees who deal directly with customers were able to respond to this question. The quality of Reclamation's staff was identified by the majority of the respondents as its greatest strength in providing customer service. Other types of responses included:

- , Excellent human resources
- , Employee flexibility with dealing with customers
- , Honesty with customers
- , Individuals that "go the distance" to provide the best customer service they can
- , Competent staff highly committed to public service
- , Responsible technical staff providing products
- , Technical expertise
- , Experienced and knowledgeable engineering staff

In addition, 97% of respondents said customer service was important part of succeeding in their job responsibilities and 94% said they were comfortable in their interactions with customers. For the most part, the employees saw themselves as knowledgeable and willing to accommodate and service customers' needs. There were some concerns on whether the agency intends to maintain the expertise needed, given its desire to move in a new direction. Remarks from the Customer Satisfaction Survey were similar to employees' comments. Most of the customers gave the staff high marks for employees being courteous, knowledgeable, and helpful in their relationships with them.

### ***Performance in Programs and Initiatives***

Both employees and customers were asked to share their perceptions with regard to performance in specific programs and initiatives and the value of those programs and initiatives to customers. Employees were asked to rate 13 Reclamation programs and initiatives as excellent, good, fair, poor, very poor, or don't know. The 13 programs rated were:

Cultural and Archeological Resources  
Dam Safety  
Endangered Species Restoration  
Environment  
Hydropower Generation  
Facilities Operations and Maintenance  
Native American Affairs  
Public Safety  
Research  
Resources Management  
Water Conservation  
Water Reuse and Treatment  
Water Supply

All of the above program and initiative employee mean scores fell in the fair to good range. Hydropower Generation, Cultural and Archaeological Resources, Dam Safety, and Water Supply programs or initiatives were rated the highest by employees. For the most part, employees' ratings were slightly higher than customer ratings. Water Supply was rated the most valuable program by both employees and customers. More than one-quarter of the employees rated Water Supply as the top program and this response was consistent among all groups in the survey. A sizeable number of employees (7%) believed that it was hard to choose a most valuable program because of the varying interest of different customer groups. Water Supply was rated the most valuable by 39% of the customer respondents.

### *Additional Comments*

All Reclamation employees, even those who don't interact with customers on a regular, basis were given the opportunity to share any additional comments they had on how customer service can be improved. 743 employees (27% response rate) responded to this question and the responses received covered a broad range of topics and concerns. Many of the responses reflected a concern about the future of the agency, such as:

- , We are run by "politics." Not the best way to do the job.
- , As an agency we don't have a direction. We don't know what types of projects to work on and no one seems to make a decision.
- , Find a mission, make a plan with the employees, and follow it.

Other employee comments included:

- , Reclamation continues to be unsure of its future role in the Western United States.
- , The west does not need more water management: when BOR stopped being an engineering and construction agency, its usefulness to Western expansion ended. Any activities beyond that mission just muddles the water.
- , Morale - I never thought it would get this low around this place. Team spirit - it is still a turf war out there.
- , Reclamation's managers need to practice what they preach. They could care less about practicing water conservation and justifying the actions in acquiring goods and services.
- , I think management needs to take a closer look at their employees - possibly more recognition for doing their jobs and making them look good - rather than criticize and tell them they could and should have done more. With no support there isn't much initiative.
- , Stronger managerial staff. Reward those who work hard and care. Revamp the classification system.

In 1998, Reclamation's customers and partners were also given a chance to share their ideas on how Reclamation can improve customer service. A majority of the customers' responses were positive, but there was a significant number of customers who viewed Reclamation's customer service as less than adequate. The 1998 customers' comments were reviewed and eight areas of concentration for improvements formed by Reclamation, dealing with:

- T Stakeholder Involvement
- T Management of Customer Information
- T Customer Relationships
- T Accessibility of Staff
- T Government Bureaucracy
- T Timeliness of Responses
- T Consistency
- T Reclamation's Changing Role

### ***Continuing the Path Forward***

Reclamation continues to accomplish and create initiatives to improve customer service. Several existing initiatives are addressing the 1998 expressed customer survey comments. Two examples include the development and implementation of a Customer Information Management System and benchmarking studies that are based on survey results and are reviewing customer service supported business practices. Finally, the 1999 completion of the employee survey has resulted in the development of a target for customer service training, established Reclamation's customer service baseline, and serves as a creditable source of comments for the continued identification of opportunities for customer service based improvement.